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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN-CHECHEN FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY ORDERED CLOSED

Classified By: Charge Daniel A. Russell. Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (U) A Nizhniy Novgorod court on October 13 ordered the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society (RCFS) to be closed. According to press reports, the court found that the organization violated the NGO law. Specifically, it ruled that RCFS had allowed its Executive Director Stanislav Dmitrievskiy to continue his affiliation with the organization after he was convicted of inciting racial hatred earlier this year. Under the law, an NGO must sever ties with any official convicted of "extremist" activities, and prosecutors filed a suit against RCFS alleging that it had failed to remove him from the board, condemn his behavior, and notify the Federal Registration Service about his activities. Dmitrievskiy told reporters he would immediately appeal the ruling and continue separate appeals of his conviction, which stemmed from the 2004 publication of statements by Chechen separatist leaders in the NGO's newspaper. Dmitrievskiy also said he would appeal to the European Court of Human Rights if necessary.

¶2. (C) Oksana Chelyusheva of RCFS told us that prosecutors had served the suit on October 9, with the hearing scheduled October 12. The NGO had no time to adequately prepare its defense or to bring in other legal advisors and other supporters from outside Russia to bolster its case. Dmitrievskiy, who represented the RCFS in court, unsuccessfully sought a postponement. Chelysheva wrote in an October 12 e-mail sent just after the hearing that the decision was predetermined based on the judge's conduct of the hearing.

¶3. (C) In a recent meeting, Dmitrievskiy and Chelyusheva acknowledged that Dmitrievskiy's continued work with the organization, which has only a small administrative staff in Nizhniy Novgorod and a few reporters in the North Caucasus, put it at risk. They said they would make no attempt to conceal his involvement. Dmitrievskiy said he was aware of the risk, but that he and Chelyusheva would continue out of principle. Dmitrievskiy told us that his conviction had already led to a shortfall in funding, and he expected that there would be further legal action forthcoming.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: RCFS' closure is the first of its kind under the new NGO law. Dmitrievskiy and Chelyusheva knew that his participation in the organization left RCFS exposed but seemed to us resigned to the idea that RCFS would be closed whether Dmitrievskiy remained executive director or not. We have little reason to expect that an appellate court will overturn the decision. They remained aggressive critics of the conduct of the war in Chechnya, recently working on a proposal to conduct research into possible war crimes committed by Russian forces. END COMMENT.  
RUSSELL